

**Amendments to the Claims**

1. (Canceled)
2. (Previously Presented) An assembly for stiffening a flexible member, the assembly comprising:
  - a stiffening member extending over a portion of the flexible member;
  - an adapter secured to the stiffening member and extending over another portion of the flexible member in a spaced relation thereto to form an annulus;
  - an insert disposed in the annulus; and
  - a ring connected to an end of the stiffening member, and wherein an end of the adapter is secured to the stiffening member by a weldment extending between the adapter and the ring.
3. (Original) The assembly of claim 2 wherein the insert is secured to the adapter and to the ring.
4. (Original) The assembly of claim 3 wherein the insert is secured to the adapter and to the ring by a weldment extending between the insert and the adapter, and by a weldment extending between the insert and the ring.
5. (Currently Amended) The assembly of claim ~~1~~ 2 wherein the insert is secured to the adapter.
6. (Previously Presented) An assembly for stiffening a flexible member, the assembly comprising:
  - a stiffening member extending over a portion of the flexible member;
  - an adapter secured to the stiffening member and extending over another portion of the flexible member in a spaced relation thereto to form an annulus; and
  - an insert disposed in the annulus, wherein the insert is secured to the adapter;
  - wherein the insert is secured to the adapter by a weldment extending between the insert and the adapter.

7. (Currently Amended) The assembly of claim ~~1~~ 2 wherein the flexible member is a pipe and wherein the stiffening member, the adapter, and the insert are cylindrical.

8. (Currently Amended) An assembly for stiffening a flexible member, the assembly comprising:

a stiffening member extending over a portion of the flexible member;

an adapter secured to the stiffening member and extending over another portion of the flexible member in a spaced relation thereto to form an annulus; and

an insert disposed in the annulus to prevent the adapter from contacting said another portion of the flexible member, wherein the insert is fabricated from a material to eliminate wear of said another portion of the flexible member;

wherein the flexible member is a pipe and wherein the stiffening member, the adapter, and the insert are cylindrical;

~~The assembly of claim 7~~ wherein the insert is formed by two semi-circular insert portions.

9. (Canceled)

10. (Previously Presented) A method for stiffening a flexible member, the method comprising:

surrounding a portion of the flexible member with a stiffening member;

surrounding another portion of the flexible member with an adapter that extends in a spaced relation to the flexible member to form an annulus;

securing the adapter to the stiffening member;

inserting an insert into the annulus; and

connecting a ring to an end of the stiffening member, and wherein the step of securing comprises welding the adapter to the ring.

11. (Original) The method of claim 10 further comprising securing the insert to the adapter and to the ring.

12. (Original) The method of claim 11 wherein the latter step of securing comprises welding the insert to the adapter and to the ring.

13. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 9 10 further comprising securing the insert to the adapter.

14. (Previously Presented) A method for stiffening a flexible member, the method comprising:

surrounding a portion of the flexible member with a stiffening member;  
surrounding another portion of the flexible member with an adapter that extends in a spaced relation to the flexible member to form an annulus;  
securing the adapter to the stiffening member;  
inserting an insert into the annulus; and  
welding the insert to the adapter.

15. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 9 10, wherein the insert is made of an elastomer material.

16. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 9 10, wherein the insert is made of polyurethane.

17. (Currently Amended) The assembly of claim ~~4~~ 6 wherein said insert is fabricated from an elastomer material.

18. (Currently Amended) The assembly of claim ~~4~~ 6 wherein said insert is fabricated from polyurethane.